

Moving Forward

I am not going to talk about revolutionary ideas which inspire strides toward waning Americans off of fossil fuels, or encourage the active pursuit of decreasing the world's population. It's not that these are unimportant, but worrying about how to decrease dependence on fossil fuels or curtailing global population requires time and money, and loads of it at that. Instead I hope to remind us of the daily actions we can and *should* be taking to minimize our consumption of resources. As you may remember from the debates, in 1979 Reagan spoke about the need for us to continue consuming. He effectively made the point that saying otherwise was un-American. I wholeheartedly disagree with this, and think it imperative that we take whatever actions we can to minimize our footprint.

One thing we can all do is shower without water. That doesn't mean don't use water, but only run it when necessary like when rinsing off soap or shampoo. The average shower takes 8 minutes^[1] yet we do not need 8 minutes of straight running water.

Perhaps more common is the idea that we should carpool. When we go to the grocery store there is absolutely no reason why we can't coordinate with friends to arrange for 3 or more people to simultaneously pick up their weekly foodstuffs, using the equivalent of 1 person's consumption of gasoline. As college students, we should also be able to look on the bright side, that we'll be saving a few bucks here and there by sharing the fuel.

We should absolutely look at our consumption of plastic bags. It costs San Francisco an estimated \$8.5 million a year to recycle plastic bags. San Jose estimates \$1 million worth of tax dollars goes to repairing jammed recycling equipment due to plastic bags.^[2] These plastic bags end up in the ocean as well. Again, as college students we all have backpacks or some fashion of school bag that we can use to pick up our groceries in, and not require another plastic bag. It collectively costs us as taxpayers to use plastic bags. The biggest surprise to me in this picture^[3] is the discrepancy in per-capita plastic bag consumption between Americans and one of the other most important countries in the world, Germany: Americans use 1267 bags per person per year, while Germans consume 0.002

Another common way to cut back on our consumption is to turn the lights off when we leave a room. If we assume that we leave 5 CFL's on a day, for an 8-hour work shift, this equates to \$110 over the course of a year that is being wasted.^[4] Not only is there no need to waste the electricity, it is *costing* you!

While this next one isn't about minimizing our footprint directly, we can protest as a method of becoming involved in those bigger-ticket items which cost the copious amounts of time and money that we perhaps don't have to give to the cause. Instead, protesting is a harmless way which requires minimal amounts of time (depending on the protest), and no money. An alternative form of protest that we can use is writing our congress people, clearly stating how we feel about the newest, biggest environmental issues, for example hydraulic fracturing in New York State. This one demands the cost of a stamp, unless you choose to send your correspondence electronically.

Finally, we can all think. We can continue to think about what parts of our daily lives should be changed in an effort to reduce consumption, and with that we must encourage our friends to do the same. As

social animals we have a tremendous power to convince others that spending a few seconds a day to better plan and reduce our resource consumption is a good thing. So go out and try it, and don't stop trying it.

References:

- [1] * reporter, Mark Kinver Environment, and B. B. C. News. "Survey Reveals Showering Habits." *BBC News*. Accessed May 21, 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-15836433>.
- [2] * Dimitrova Russo, Daniella, and Todd Myers. "Should Cities Ban Plastic Bags?" *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition* 260, no. 83 (October 8, 2012): R5–R6.
- [3] † "Plastic Pollution | Publish with Glogster!" *Glogster*. Accessed May 21, 2014. <http://www.glogster.com/saineek1998/plastic-pollution/g-6lp17rvkp5nfntp2d3145a0>.
- [4] * "Energy Use in the Home | The Energy Collective." Accessed May 21, 2014. <http://theenergycollective.com/vbugnion/306361/what-do-our-bad-energy-habits-cost-us>.

* Informational reference to an article or research paper

† Photographic reference - this link has multiple images. Consult the slides to determine which picture is being referenced: <http://sustainabilityproblems.wikispaces.com/Go+Fix+It%21>